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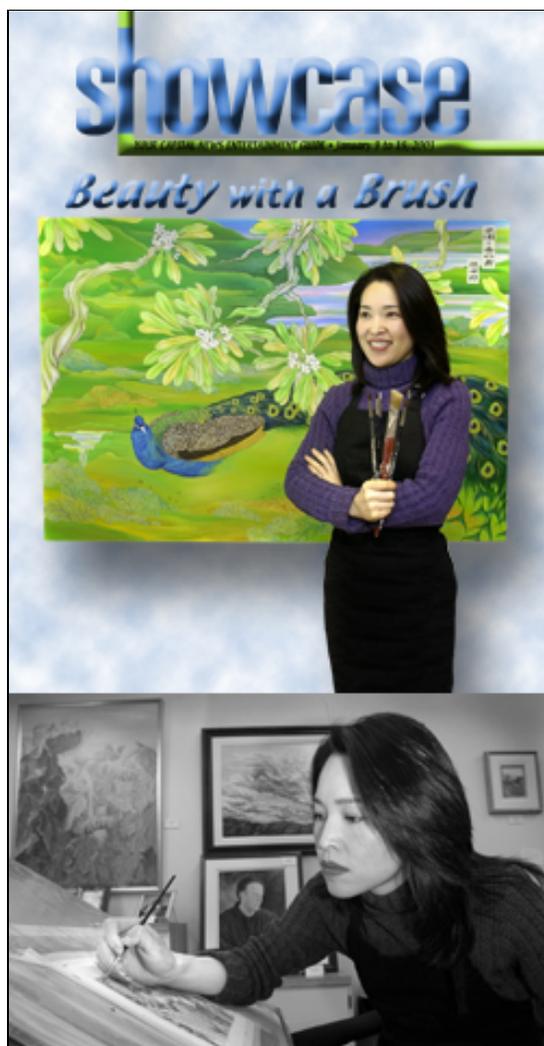
Cover Story Disciplined art

By Neal McKenna, Showcase contributor

She's a woman for all seasons! Before settling into life as an artist in Canada, Mayumi Hatano was an actress, in Japan, on the musical stage. "I enjoyed working in the theatre but more importantly, I like routine and order in my life, I need it," she explains. "That's why acting wasn't the thing for me—and that's also why painting is."

Today, Hatano's paintings adeptly convey the serenity she seeks. However, Mayumi Hatano is anything but the stereotypical demure Japanese woman who speaks in muted tones. Instead, she is a vibrant personality with an infectious laugh. "In Japan, I lived in a very typical family in a small village called Hokkaido. It's on Japan's most northerly island. Life there was very traditional—unfortunately, I was not. But I endured it until I was 18 and finished high school."

After graduation, wild horses couldn't keep her away from Tokyo. For two years, she studied at the School of Music and gave it her all. Then came the rounds of auditions and very quickly, work in the theatre, TV productions and films. Of course, as good as it all sounds, acting still wasn't providing enough income to really call it "a living." Like most aspiring thespians, Hatano supplemented her acting income with a "real" job. "But I always found interesting work," she laughs. "For a while, I was a hostess at a formal nightclub and I got to wear wonderful, fancy clothing and have a party every night—just the right thing for a girl in her early 20s."



Mayumi Hatano has shifted her career goal from the stage in Japan to painting in Canada. When a life on stage didn't offer the regimen, and income, a young woman on her own in Tokyo needed, Mayumi Hatano headed east, to Canada, and was inspired by our wide open spaces to paint. Photos Gordon Bazzana

By 1986, Hatano was ready to take on New York, but a twist of fate made her decide to stop off in Vancouver to take in Expo. "When I got to Vancouver," she exclaims, "I couldn't believe it! There was so much space! The city was nice. Expo was nice, but the space and the clean air—that's what impressed me about Canada. I got this sense of freedom that I'd never experienced before and had the notion I could accomplish anything here, if I put my mind to it."

Elbowroom and lots of it, made Hatano abandon her aspirations in the Big Apple. But first things first. In Vancouver, she had to learn the language. "I knew it was completely important for me to master English, so for the first six months in Vancouver, I did not speak one single word of Japanese. It was very hard to do but I did it. But it was learning English that allowed me to learn what my real passion was.

The principal of the language school I was attending, came into my class one day and asked all the students to project into the future and tell him what they would like to be doing in 10 year's time. I really thought about it. I knew it had to be creative but I didn't know how. When it was finally my turn to answer the question, I didn't think. I just said: "I want to be an artist." And that was not only my answer for him but for me too."

In 1992, Hatano took her first painting class and immediately showed superior talent and skill. Encouraged by her instructor and classmates, she entered her first painting in the Richmond regional art competition and received an honorable mention. The following year, another painting was selected for the BC Festival of the Arts Exhibition. This recognition was a very big occurrence in the professional development of an emerging artist.

Working in acrylic and watercolour, Hatano has been a full-time painter since 1998. "I don't have a typical style," she confesses. I paint still life, landscapes and more recently, I have incorporated fabrics into my work. ...You can't look at one of my paintings and say 'Oh, that's her style,' because it won't be. It will be one of my styles.

"People expect that I would paint Japanese themes, but it's only been in the last little while that I've begun to do that.

"For me, it's more about the subject, colour and style of painting I'm about to do which gives me the inspiration and desire to paint it.

"Always, my true, most essential motivation to paint comes from satisfying my own creative desire."

Hatano has some strong thoughts about artists' statements. "I don't like them." She pulls a face. "They make artwork seem complicated and difficult. I think artists should paint and writers should write. Art should speak for itself and be what it is to the person who is looking at it.

"If you have to explain it in words, then you haven't done a very good job as an artist."

The very first artist to open a studio in the Rotary Arts Centre, she has been in residence there since August of last year. "I love this place," she declares. "I love the space and the light and the people coming and going. This facility has also made a huge difference in my career. Not only is it a very good place to work, being so accessible to the public, but the Centre's staff also helps with marketing my work. I'm terrible when it comes to marketing, so it's wonderful to have them look after me in this way. Now, all I have to do is produce the art."

To enjoy first-hand exposure to Mayumi Hatano and her varied artworks, visit her studio on the second floor of the new Rotary Arts Centre on Cawston Avenue, or surf the Net to her Web site at www.mhatano.com.